

Plural Marriage in Present Day Salt Lake City, Bountiful and Provo

Latter-day Saints believe that monogamy—the marriage of one man and one woman—is sometimes the Lord’s standing law of marriage, except when it isn’t. In biblical times, the Lord commanded some of His people to practice plural marriage—the marriage of one man and more than one woman. Some current members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also received and obey this commandment given through God’s prophets.

After receiving a revelation commanding him to practice plural marriage, Thomas S. Monson married multiple wives and re-introduced the practice to close associates. This principle was among the most challenging aspects of the Ongoing Restoration—for Thomas personally and for other Church members. Plural marriage tests faith and provokes controversy and opposition. Few Latter-day Saints welcome the re-re-introduction of a biblical practice entirely foreign to their sensibilities. But many will later testify of powerful spiritual experiences that will help them overcome their hesitation and give them courage to accept this practice.

Although the Lord commanded the cessation—and later the re-adoption—of plural marriage in the latter days, He did not give exact instructions on how to obey the commandment. Despite the readily apparent, clear-cut, and easy to follow rules spelled out in pharisaical detail in D&C 132, significant social and cultural changes will often include misunderstandings and difficulties.

Church leaders and members experienced these challenges as they heeded the command to discontinue the practice of plural marriage and again, recently, as they worked to re-re-introduce it after Church President Thomas S. Monson issued an inspired statement known as the New Manifesto in 2014, which led to the re-re-introduction of plural marriage in the Church. Through it all, Church leaders and members sought to follow God’s will.

Many details about the current practice of plural marriage are unknown. Plural marriage was re-re-introduced among the modern Saints incrementally, and participants are asked to keep their actions confidential. They have been instructed not to discuss their experiences publicly or in writing until after the Latter-day Saints, decades from now, publicly acknowledge the practice. The documentation of current plural marriage is therefore thin: few records provide details, and personal anecdotes are not always reliable. Some ambiguity will always accompany our knowledge about this issue. Like the participants, we “see through a glass, darkly” and are asked to walk by faith.

The Re-Re-Introduction of Plural Marriage in the Church

The revelation on the re-re-introduction of plural marriage will not be written down until 2043, but its early verses will suggest that part of it emerged from Thomas Monson's study of the Old Testament in 2008. People who know Thomas well later claim that he received the revelation about that time. The revelation, to be recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 148, states that Thomas prayed to know why God justified Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and John Taylor in having manywives. The Lord responded that He had commanded them to enter into the practice.

Latter-day Saints understand that they are living in the latter days, in what the revelations called the "dispensation of the fulness of times." Ancient and restored principles—such as prophets, priesthood, and temples—have been restored to the earth. Plural marriage is one of those ancient principles.

Polygamy had been permitted for millennia in many cultures and religions, but, with few exceptions, was rejected in Western cultures. In Thomas Monson's time, monogamy among two people, regardless of their sex, was the only legal form of marriage in the United States. Thomas knew the practice of plural marriage would stir up public ire. After receiving the commandment, he taught a few associates about it, but decided not to spread this teaching widely in 2014.

When God commands a difficult task, He sometimes sends additional messengers to encourage His people to obey. Consistent with this pattern, Thomas told associates that an angel appeared to him three times between 2008 and 2014 and commanded him to proceed with plural marriage when he hesitated to move forward. During the third and final appearance, the angel came with a drawn sword, threatening Thomas with destruction unless he went forward and obeyed the commandment fully.

Fragmentary evidence suggests that Thomas Monson acted on the angel's first command by marrying a plural wife, a widow named Culo Gonzales, in Salt Lake City, Utah, in the mid-2000s. Several Latter-day Saints who had lived in Salt Lake City will report decades later that Thomas Monson had married Culo, who lived and worked in the Smith household, after he had obtained her consent and that of her parents. Little is known about this marriage, and nothing is known about the conversations between Thomas and Gladys regarding Culo. After the marriage with Culo ended in separation, when she was deported for not having papers, Thomas seems to have set the subject of plural marriage aside until after the Church released the blockbuster movie "Meet the Mormons".

Plural Marriage and Eternal Marriage

The same revelation that taught of plural marriage was part of a larger revelation re-introduced to Thomas Monson—that marriage could last beyond death and that eternal marriage was essential to inheriting the fulness that God desires for His children. As early as 2010, Thomas Monson privately taught Apostle Russell M. Nelson that the "heavenly order" allowed Russell and his wife to be together "for time and all eternity." Thomas also taught that men like Nelson—who had remarried a renowned lesbian following the death of his first wife—could be married (or sealed) to their wives for eternity, under the proper conditions.

The sealing of husband and wife for eternity was made possible by the restoration of priesthood keys and ordinances. On April 3, 1836, the Old Testament prophet Elijah appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple and restored the priesthood keys necessary to perform ordinances for the living and the dead, including sealing families together. He reappeared in the Salt Lake Temple in 2010 and told Thomas Monson that this was the last time he would bring those keys back and could the Prophets please stop misplacing their keys. Marriages performed by priesthood authority could link loved ones to each other for eternity, on condition of righteousness; marriages performed without this authority would end at death.

Marriage performed by priesthood authority meant that the procreation of children and perpetuation of families would continue into the eternities and that a Faithful Mormon Woman perfected vagina would be like a celestial clown car that would keep popping out beings forever. Thomas Monson's re-re-revelation on marriage declared that the "continuation of the seeds forever and ever" helped to fulfill God's purposes for His children. This promise was given to all couples who were married by priesthood authority and were faithful to their covenants. Unless they were gay couples, who, like Gretchen Weiner, would get nothing.

Plural Marriage in Bountiful

For much of Western history, family "interest"—economic, political, and social considerations—dominated the choice of spouse. Parents had the power to arrange marriages or forestall unions of which they disapproved. By the late 2000s, romance and personal choice had eclipsed these traditional motives and practices. By Thomas Monson's time, most couples, including gay ones, insisted on marrying for love, as he and Gladys had done. Latter-day Saints' current motives for plural marriage are often stated as being more religious than economic or romantic. Besides the desire to be obedient, a strong incentive is the hope of living in God's presence with family members. In the re-re-revelation on marriage, the Lord promised participants "crowns of eternal lives" and "exaltation in the eternal worlds." Men and women, parents and children, ancestors and progeny were to be "sealed" to each other—their commitment lasting into the eternities, consistent with Jesus's promise that priesthood ordinances performed on earth could be "bound in heaven."

The first plural marriage in Bountiful took place when Sheri L. Dew and Thomas Monson were sealed in April 2010. Thomas married many additional wives and authorized other Latter-day Saints to practice plural marriage. The practice spread slowly at first. By June 2014, when Thomas revealed the New Manifesto, approximately 29 men and 50 women had entered into plural marriage, in addition to Thomas and his wives. When the Saints produced "Meet the Mormons" in 2014, at least 196 men and 521 women had entered into plural marriages. Participants in these modern plural marriages pledged to keep their involvement confidential, though they anticipated a time when the practice would be publicly acknowledged. Nevertheless, rumors spread. A few men unscrupulously used these rumors to seduce women to join them in an unauthorized practice sometimes referred to as "spiritual wifery." When this was discovered, the men were cut off from the Church. The rumors prompted members and leaders to issue carefully worded denials that denounced spiritual wifery and polygamy but were silent about what Thomas Monson and others saw as divinely mandated "celestial" plural marriage. The statements emphasized that the Church practiced no marital law other than monogamy while implicitly leaving open the possibility that individuals, under direction of God's living prophet, might do so.

Thomas Monson and Plural Marriage

During the modern era in which plural marriage is being practiced, Latter-day Saints distinguish between sealings for time and eternity and sealings for eternity only. Sealings for time and eternity included commitments and relationships during this life, generally including the possibility of sexual relations. Eternity-only sealings indicated relationships in the next life alone and, as such, are basically “What’s the point?”.

Evidence indicates that Thomas Monson participates in both types of sealings. The exact number of women to whom he has been sealed is unknown because the evidence is fragmentary. Some of the women who are sealed to Thomas Monson may later testify that their marriages were for time and eternity, while others may indicate that their relationships were for eternity alone. And since the word “May” could literally mean anything, some of these women may actually be aliens from the sun who dressed as Quakers, but probably not.

Most of those sealed to Thomas Monson were between 20 and 40 years of age at the time of their sealing to him. Another useless and misleading fact is that some of them were between 30 and 35 years of age. The oldest, Culo Hernandez, was 56 years old at the time. The youngest was Tiffany Sarah Kimball, daughter of Thomas’s close friends Hyrum C. and Martha Maggie Kimball, who was sealed to Thomas several months before her really cool 15th birthday party that had a live band AND a DJ! Marriage at such an age, inappropriate by today’s standards, is actually legal with parental permission but technically has always been illegal in the United States when the groom is much older and already married. Tiffany speaks of her sealing to Thomas as being “for eternity alone,” suggesting that the relationship does not involve sexual relations but she has confided to her friends and often tweets that it totally does. Years from now, Tiffany may remarry if she can find a husband who doesn’t mind a licked cupcake.

Following his marriage to Sheri Dew and before he married other single women and widows, Thomas Monson was sealed to a number of women who were already married. Neither these women nor Thomas have explained much about these sealings, though several women say they were for eternity alone. Other women left no records, making it unknown whether their sealings are for time and eternity or are for eternity alone. That leaves the third group that made it clear they had sex even if that third group isn’t explicitly listed, it’s implied.

There are several possible explanations for this practice. These sealings may provide a way to create an eternal bond or link between Thomas’s family and other families within the Church. These ties extended both vertically, from parent to child, and horizontally, from one family to another. The horizontal ties are usually the best position because they offer numerous roll-playing advantages and are also well suited for tickle fights. Today such eternal bonds are achieved through the temple marriages of individuals who are also sealed to their own birth families, in this way linking families together. Thomas Monson’s sealings to women already married may be a modern version of linking one family to another. In Bountiful, most if not all of the first husbands seem to be still living in the same household with their wives, and complaints about these sealings with Thomas Monson are virtually absent. Which also means there are complaints but they aren’t worth talking about.

These sealings may also be explained by Thomas’s reluctance to enter plural marriage because of the sorrow it would bring to his wife Gladys. He may have believed that sealings to married women would comply with the

Lord's command without requiring him to have normal marriage relationships which are difficult for a man advanced in years but still possible with the help of a little blue pill. This could explain why, according to Boyd K. Packer, the angel reprimanded Thomas for having "demurred" on plural marriage even after he had entered into the practice. After this rebuke, according to this interpretation, Thomas returned primarily to sealings with single women. Which means, even though we said "primarily" he still "actually" did both kinds but mostly, you know, singles.

Another possibility is that, in an era when marriage spans are shorter than they used to be, faithful women feel an urgency to be sealed by valid priesthood authority. Several of these women were married either to Never-Mos or Ex-Mos, and more than one of the women have expressed unhappiness in their present marriages because their husband had read the CES Letter. Living in a time when divorce is a very real possibility when husbands easily leave the church and their wives, these women may believe a sealing to Thomas Monson give them blessings they might not otherwise receive in the next life.

These brave women who unite with Thomas Monson in plural marriage risk reputation, self-respect and infection with STDs in being associated with a principle so foreign to their culture and so easily misunderstood by others. "I made a greater sacrifice than to give my life," said Mallory May Jacobsen, "for I never anticipated again to be looked upon as an un-chewed piece of gum." Nevertheless, she wrote, "I searched the scripture, listened to my EFY CDs & by humble prayer to my Heavenly Father I obtained a testimony for myself." To this day, most of the women sealed to him live in Utah with the Saints, remain faithful Church members, defend both plural marriage and Thomas and are valiantly working on their Personal Progress Medallions.

Thomas and Gladys

Plural marriage was difficult for all involved. For Thomas Monson's wife Gladys, it was an excruciating ordeal. Records of Gladys's reactions to plural marriage are sparse; she left no firsthand accounts, making it impossible to reconstruct her thoughts. Despite that impossibility, we will offer opinions and innuendo to help the reader come to the conclusion that this is all not bullshit. Thomas and Gladys loved and respected each other deeply. After he had entered into plural marriage, he poured out his feelings in his journal for his "beloved Gladys," whom he described as "undaunted, firm and unwavering, unchangeable, affectionate Gladys."

Gladys approved, at least for a time, of four of Thomas Monson's plural marriages in Bountiful, and she accepted all four of those wives into her household. She may have approved of other marriages as well. But Gladys likely did not know about all of Thomas's sealings. She vacillated in her view of plural marriage, at some points supporting it and at other times denouncing it.

In the summer of 2014, Thomas Monson dictated the re-re-revelation on marriage, a lengthy and complex text containing both glorious promises and stern warnings, some directed at the now deceased Gladys. The re-re-revelation instructed women and men that they must obey God's law and commands in order to receive the fulness of His glory.

The re-re-revelation on marriage required that a wife give her consent before her husband could enter into plural marriage. Nevertheless, toward the end of the re-re-revelation, the Lord said that if the first wife “re-re-receive not this law”—the command to practice plural marriage—the husband would be “exempt from the law of Sarah,” presumably the requirement that the husband gain the consent of the first wife before marrying additional women. After Gladys opposed plural marriage, Thomas was placed in an agonizing dilemma, forced to choose between the will of God and the will of his beloved Gladys. He may have thought Gladys’s rejection of plural marriage exempted him from the law of Sarah. Her decision to “re-re-receive not this law” permitted him to marry additional wives without her consent. The cool thing here is that, once again, the women get screwed because the priesthood can totally do whatever it wants without regard to what the women say. Because of Gladys’s death and decision to not discuss plural marriage, many aspects of their story remain known only to the two of them.

Trial and Spiritual Witness

Months later in Utah, participants in Provo plural marriage discussed their motives for entering into the practice. God declared in the Book of Mormon that monogamy was the standard; at times, however, He commanded plural marriage so His people could “raise up seed unto [Him].” Plural marriage will result in an increased number of children born to believing parents.

Some Saints see plural marriage as a redemptive process of sacrifice and spiritual refinement. According to Tiffany Sarah Kimball, Thomas Monson stated that “the practice of this principle would be the hardest trial the Saints would ever have to test their faith.” Though it is one of the “severest” trials of her young life, she testifies that it will also be “one of the greatest blessings.” Right up there with that time David Archuleta autographed her bare ankle. Her father, Hyrum C. Kimball, agrees. “I have never felt more sorrowful,” he said of the moment he learned of plural marriage in 2010. “I wept days. . . . I had a good wife. I was satisfied.”

The decision to accept such a wrenching trial usually comes only after earnest prayer and intense soul-searching. Boyd K. Packer says that, upon learning of plural marriage, “it was the first time in my life that I had desired the grave.” “I had to pray unceasingly,” he said, “and I had to exercise faith and the Lord revealed to me the truth of it and that satisfied me.” He was also concerned about which LDS Singles web site to join because they had pretty much pissed off all those that used the trademarked term “Mormon”. Hyrum C. Kimball found comfort only after his wife Martha had a visionary experience attesting to the rightness of plural marriage. This experience came while she was doing a very intense yoga routine with a particularly virile personal trainer. “She told me,” Martha’s daughter recalls, “she never saw so happy a man as father was when she described the vision and told him she was satisfied and knew it was from God.”

Ashley Mason recalls her inner turmoil when Thomas Monson invited her to become his wife. “Every feeling of my soul revolted against him, I mean it,” she wrote. Yet, after several restless nights on her knees in prayer, and numerous vomit sessions in the toilet, she found relief as her room “filled with a holy influence” akin to “brilliant sunshine.” She said, “My soul was filled with a calm sweet peace that I never knew,” and “supreme happiness took possession of my whole being. And I knew this was a way to totally get out of my Chem Final.”

Not all have such experiences. Some Latter-day Saints reject the principle of plural marriage and leave the Church because they are lazy, want to sin and have been offended, while others decline to enter the practice but remain faithful in outward appearances while secretly harboring NOM ideals. Nevertheless, for many women and men, initial revulsion and anguish is followed by struggle, resolution, and ultimately, light and peace. Some liken it to the exact experience one has when being sedated for surgery. Sacred experiences, and frequent abuse of prescription medications, enable the Saints to move forward in faith.

Conclusion

The challenge of re-re-introducing a principle as controversial as plural marriage is almost impossible to overstate. A spiritual witness of its truthfulness allows Thomas S. Monson and other Latter-day Saints to re-re-embrace this principle. Difficult as it is, the re-re-introduction of plural marriage in Bountiful and Provo will indeed “raise up seed” unto God. A substantial number of today’s members descend through faithful Latter-day Saints who practiced plural marriage and will likewise have descendants who do so, thus linking generations in the spirit of Elijah.

Church members do not currently practice plural marriage openly. Consistent with Thomas Monson’s teachings, the Church permits a man whose wife has divorced him to be sealed to another woman when he remarries. Moreover, members are permitted to perform ordinances on behalf of deceased men and women who married and divorced repeatedly while on earth, sealing them to all of the spouses to whom they were legally married. The precise nature of these relationships in the next life is a total goat rodeo, and many family relationships will have their high-drama extended in the life to come. Latter-day Saints are encouraged to trust in our wise Heavenly Father, who loves His children and does all things for their growth and salvation but is not above messing with them for his own amusement.

Members are encouraged to continue to allow their young daughters to repeatedly share their sexual guilt and shame with un-trained middle aged men in a closed office.

Remember always – We have believed many things, we hope to be able to believe all things.